Emily Balch Seminar: Asian American Popular Culture

Paper One: Close Reading Exercise (10 points total)
Length: 1-2 pages
DUE: Thursday, 09/24 uploaded to Moodle by 5:00PM

This first short paper asks you to analyze Paisley Rekdal's poem "Antiquity" by using the technique of close reading. Close reading means working from textual details in order to discuss the deeper significance of the text. (Note: use these instructions in tandem with the "Tips for Close Reading" handout).

Paper format:

- Double-spaced
- 12-point font
- 1-inch margins
- MLA parenthetical text citations:
  https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_quotations.html

How to conduct a close reading:

1. ANNOTATION: Read the entire poem out loud, then mark up the poem with anything and everything you notice about how the language is working. Do this at least three times – you'd be surprised what you see the last time around. How does the poem work? Consider its use and patterns of diction (word choice), syntax (arrangement of words), rhetoric, figurative language, tone, speaker or point of view, sound/rhythm, themes, irony, reference to other texts, or any other textual elements that seem to stand out.

2. SELECTION: Select a few of your annotations that seem the most interesting, surprising, or troubling. Not every annotation will be significant, so it's okay to complete this process several times to see which ones will be the richest for generating your own analysis.

3. SIGNIFICANCE: Why might the annotations you selected matter? Think locally first – how do these details and stylistic decisions contribute to our understanding of the poem? What do they help to convey, and how? Then think big picture – how do your annotations illuminate the larger themes and concerns of Paisley Rekdal's poetry project, which deals with the history of Chinese Exclusion and the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad?

4. WRITE: In one to two double-spaced pages, introduce the passage you have selected and analyze how individual textual details in this passage contribute to a deeper understanding of the themes of "Antiquity" as a whole. Make sure to avoid summarizing the poem; your goal is to carefully show us how the text or ideas work, not to describe or rewrite what the poem says.

5. OPTIONAL: After you take a first stab at completing your own interpretation of Rekdal's poem, you are welcome to ask AI to help you generate a SEPARATE close reading of this passage. Anything you use from AI in your final draft MUST be properly cited, and you must also write an additional page that critically reflects on the benefits, as well as the potential drawbacks, of using generative AI.

Resources:

Should you need additional help composing your essay, you are encouraged to make appointments with Bryn Mawr's Writing Center: https://brynmawr.mywconline.com/

Guidelines to keep in mind:

SCOPE

- ☐ Does not just summarize or describe
- ☐ Avoids generalizations (e.g. "In this poem, nature is cruel")
- ☐ Has stakes for how we interpret the text as a whole (your first paper doesn't need to present a fully fleshed out argument, but it should offer some thoughts on how the passage you selected relates to the larger themes of Rekdal's poetry).

EVIDENCE

- ☐ The paper provides an appropriate distribution of direct quotations from the text(s) that are supported by original commentary

ORGANIZATION

- ☐ The paper is structured logically (introduction, body paragraphs, concluding thoughts)
- ☐ The paper has clear topic sentences
- ☐ The paper avoids repeating itself

STYLE

- ☐ The paper has an absence of grammatical and mechanical errors
- ☐ The paper follows all formatting instructions